

Book Discussion Questions

Branding the American West: Paintings and Films, 1900-1950

Edited by Marian Wardle and Sarah E. Boehme, University of Oklahoma Press, 2016

1. What does the title *Branding the American West* mean to you? In what ways do you see the publication exploring the theme of branding?
2. Essay author Dean Rader begins “Part of the Strangeness: Notes on Landscape, Branding and the American West” with his first memory of “landscape.” (page 39.) What is your first memory of realizing a distinct idea about landscape? How does Rader’s personal approach affect his writing about the theme?
3. John Ott in “Westward Contraction: Maynard Dixon Paints the Great Depression” argues that “Dixon’s lifelong attraction and contributions to the romance of the frontier West governed his artistic response to the Great Depression.” (p. 65.) How do you see Dixon’s concepts of the frontier relating to issues of the Depression?
4. American western art has often been categorized as documentary art. In the conclusion of “The Weary West,” Jimmy L. Bryan defines the artist of the exhibition as “subjective truth tellers.” (p. 110.) What do you think he meant by that term and does it affect the perception and categorization of western art?
5. Susan Rugh in “Branding the Southwest for Tourists” concludes that “tourists consumed the Southwest in search of an unchanging place that never existed.” (p. 133.) How do you reconcile the author’s idea of a Southwest that is both unchanging and non-existent?
6. As a contrast, in “Taos and Its Other Neighbors: Intertribal Visiting in Taos School Painting” Elizabeth Hutchinson wrote, that “the paintings in this publication document ongoing interaction between Taos and its Native neighbors in ways that deny the myth of Pueblo life as unchanging.” (p. 141.) What are some of the instances Hutchinson documents and how do you think her view affects our understanding of life in the Southwest?
7. LeAnne Howe in “Imagine There’s No Cowboy” discusses scholarly research that finds “the effects of ‘Indian stereotypes’ result in low self-esteem, lower grades in school and higher dropout rates of American Indians in high school and college.” (p. 169.) How do you see the paintings and films referenced in the publication contributing to stereotyping?
8. Which was your favorite work of art in the publication and why?

For Book Discussion, Thursday, August 17, 2017, Noon, Stark Museum of Art.

Questions prepared by Sarah E. Boehme, 6/28/17

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